

How Alaska Air Group Takes Employee Communications to New Heights



Challenge

Alaska's in-house intranet, built on outdated technology, couldn't scale to meet the evolving needs of its growing workforce. Frequent crashes during high-traffic periods left Alaska unable to share critical operational updates with employees when they needed to most. The "one-size-fits-all" intranet also didn't serve the needs of a diverse, distributed employee base.

Solution

Seeking a flexible, scalable solution, Alaska embarked on a rigorous evaluation process, ultimately choosing Staffbase for its customizable intranet and fully branded mobile app. Staffbase's modern platform allowed Alaska to shift IT resources away from maintaining an in-house system, focusing instead on delivering a tailored communication experience.

Results

The new intranet and Team AAG employee mobile app have become Alaska's central hub for employee communications. Team AAG is now an integral part of Alaska's internal communications strategy, guiding employees to the tools, resources, and daily information they need through a personalized homepage customized for each employee.



How an innovative airline modernized its intranet with a flexible, reliable, and efficient solution.



30,000+
employees



SEA (Seattle)



330 aircraft
in fleet

Alaska Air Group has been recognized for pioneering technologies that provide the highest level of customer service in the industry. Alaska Air Group has a rich history of adopting technology to enhance operations and improve customer experiences. This culture of innovation also extends internally to the way the organization communicates with 30,000-plus employees throughout Air Group, which includes Alaska Airlines, Hawaiian Airlines, Horizon Air and McGee Air Services.

“*Employees are the face of the business, and we’ve always tried to innovate and push the limit when it comes to how we serve them,*”

explains David Henrich, Senior Manager of Communication Operations, who has worked at Alaska Airlines for 26 years.

To execute on its vision to provide the best employee experience, Alaska selected Staffbase as a platform for delivering innovative internal communications.

An outdated in-house intranet that didn’t scale

In 2015, Henrich’s communications team pushed the limits of innovation by developing an in-house employee intranet and mobile app that were unique in the industry at the time. While these tools served Alaska well for several years, they could not keep up with the changing business needs and growing workforce.

The intranet went down any time it had a massive amount of traffic—typically when something very important was taking place. It also did not fulfill the diverse needs of Alaska's employee base.

“We lacked the ability to target and personalize content, and one of the things that makes us unique is that Alaska and Horizon are almost like having six to eight different businesses within one,”

Henrich explains.

The airline's distributed workforce includes:

- Flight attendants and pilots who seldom work at a computer
- Maintenance personnel who are using mobile devices
- Back-office employees who work at desktops
- Customer service agents who are mobile throughout the airport

“We had this existing one-size-fits-all intranet, but one-size-fits-all does not work in our industry. Employees need the right information at the right time and to connect in the way that's right for them,”

Henrich says.

Outdated technology and tools that lived on different systems and platforms made it difficult for employees to perform their jobs, which impacted employee productivity and happiness.

“We wanted to find something that could be that front door—a central hub—to get employees everything they needed to do their job regardless of who they are,” Henrich says.

David Henrich
Senior Manager of
Communication Operations



ON-TIME ARRIVALS

MONTH TO DATE

YESTERDAY

SCHEDULE COMPLETION

MONTH TO DATE

YESTERDAY

MISHANDLED BAGS

MONTH TO DATE

YESTERDAY

GUEST SATISFACTION (AAG)

MONTH TO DATE

YESTERDAY

SAFETY REPORTING

MONTH TO DATE

YESTERDAY

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Alaska



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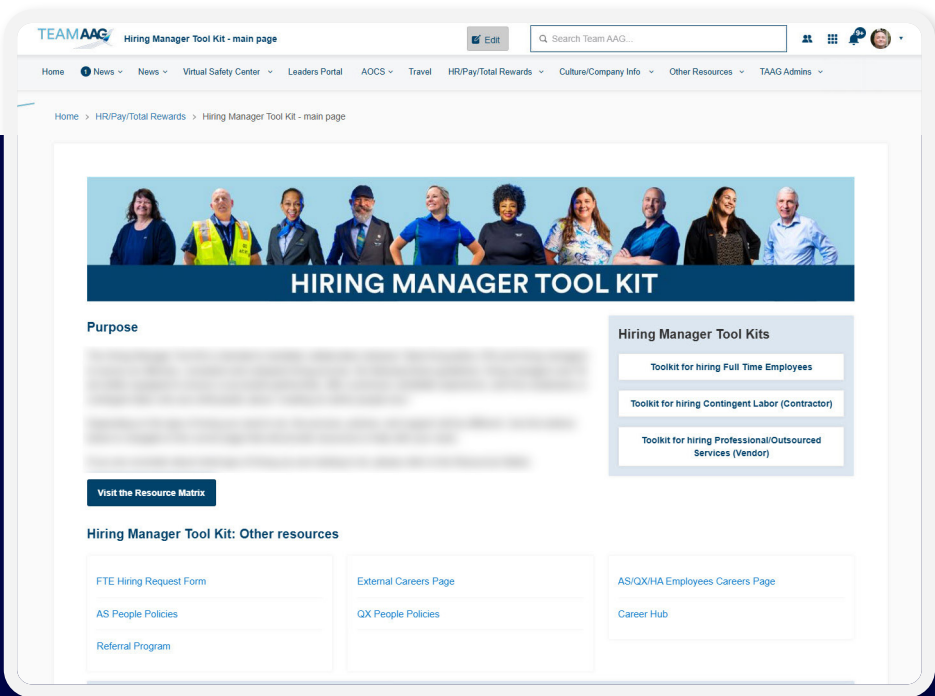
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The business case for a modern, flexible intranet

It was clear to Henrich and his team that Alaska needed to modernize its intranet. He made the case to financial and IT leadership, showing them the limitations of the current in-house built intranet and what they could achieve by modernizing it—including the ability to reliably communicate information during critical times and shift IT resources away from maintaining the intranet in-house.

During a rigorous process that evaluated eight vendors, Alaska selected Staffbase. According to Henrich,

“ Even though we were on very old technology, we’d lived in this spoiled state where if we could imagine it, and if we could make the technology bend to do what we needed, we could create it. A lot of the systems we looked at had significant limitations out of the box. Staffbase had, without a doubt, the most flexibility based on what we were trying to do from a business standpoint.”

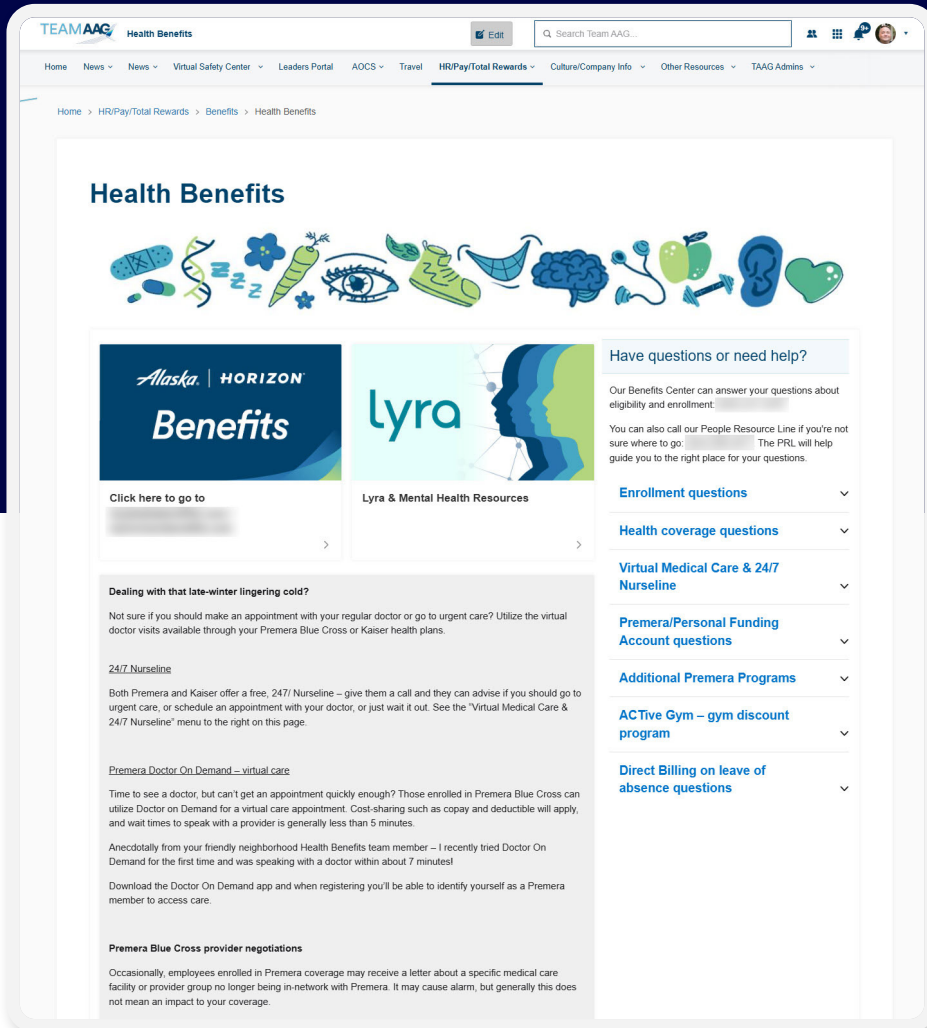


That flexibility was key when designing to the business and operational needs of a difficult-to-reach employee base connecting over many different types of devices. Henrich's team could target audiences by role—e.g., pilots, flight attendants, ground crew, and airport staff—with the information that is most relevant to them at the times they need it most. When a weather event affected ground operations and flights, Alaska used Staffbase to target specific roles in the affected geographic areas without blasting the information to other employees who didn't need it. Staffbase laid the foundation for tiering communications at the corporate, division, and local levels in other areas of the business as well. This ensured information was consistent, relevant, and locally targeted.

The Staffbase Employee App was another key differentiator because it enabled a centralized experience that didn't require special support from the IT team. Employees could search directly for the mobile app, called Team AAG (after Alaska Air Group) in their device's app store and log in with their existing credentials. Once in the app, employees got a full Alaska branded experience tailored specifically to their role and needs. This streamlined user onboarding, created efficiencies for the IT team, and allowed IT to phase out support for the old intranet.

The Alaska rollout team took an employee-centric approach to designing and launching the new intranet, implementing it in stages, and soliciting constant employee feedback. **The 85% adoption of the Team AAG platform in the first two months far surpassed the internal goal of 50% by the end of the first year. A year from launch, adoption grew to 99.5% with 96% being active users.** To Henrich's surprise, there was no negative feedback from employees because the app was so easy to use.





A central hub for personalized messaging that “lands”

Implementing the Staffbase platform allowed Alaska to bring employee tools and resources into a central location, to communicate consistently with employees on multiple channels, and to increase employee engagement. The Team AAG app has become an integral part of the internal communications strategy while guiding employees to the information, resources, and tools they need daily—with a homepage that’s customized to each employee.



The benefits extend to email, another important communication channel for Alaska. “What is really nice about Staffbase is that instead of sending a separate email, we create the story in the platform and then we can do a push notification for email. All roads lead back to the intranet, so we’re meeting the employees wherever they’re at but then driving them to the center,” Henrich says.

Staffbase’s analytics suite plays a critical role in ensuring the centralized content lands with the intended audience.

“*We can now look at any group that we target, drill down into workgroups, and see how many group members are looking at content. If something isn’t performing well with a certain group, we know where we need to do the extra work and push resources there. We can also try to figure out why something is not resonating and change messaging accordingly,*”

Henrich says.

His team can focus reinforcement where it’s needed most without fatiguing the rest of the organization with overcommunication.

By analyzing heat maps in the platform, the communications team has learned that it takes about three days, on average, for employees to consume important content. This data has allowed them to tailor how long flagship content gets highlighted and adjust their strategy for maximum engagement.

Decentralizing for efficiency and scale

Staffbase enables Alaska Air Group not only to scale communications reliably during critical times, but also to decentralize content creation and ownership. Leaders in different workgroups can create their own content and boost engagement with their teams. They no longer need to rely heavily on the communications team, which in the past created a bottleneck.

Content in Staffbase is also easy to manage.

“*I was recently doing a demo of Staffbase for our flight attendants to show how easy it is to post a new bulletin. And our vice president said, ‘That’s it? Is it really that easy?’ The ability to quickly post information is critical in times of change, whether that’s due to weather, important corporate matters, or other significant operational changes.”*

Henrich says.

Improving the employee experience

A year after launch, Staffbase is improving the employee experience in many ways with consistent features across all employee groups. Widgets such as “join” or “subscribe” buttons remove a significant amount of friction and increase the company’s ability to engage and communicate with employees.

As the transition continues, Henrich expects the new intranet to be a game-changer in enriching many employee-focused initiatives. These include improving new employee onboarding and satisfaction and increasing engagement in Alaska’s diversity, equity, and inclusion program, called Belong. No matter where Alaska Air Group’s journey takes them next, they know that the Staffbase team can help them get there.

**99.5% employee app adoption
and 96% active users**

**Enabled granular
communications targeting
to 23,000+ employees**

**98% positive employee
feedback at launch**

**Comms platform that
can scale, even for
massive critical events**

“ The biggest value of Staffbase for complex, distributed workforces like ours is that it allows you to communicate agnostically. Regardless of what you do for work, how you get your information, and where you are, you can be reached in the way that you want to be reached with information that you need to do your job.”

— David Henrich, Senior Manager of Communication Operations





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